

## Alhurra's coverage of Al-Aqsa Mosque Clashes

Host: We welcome our viewers and we go directly to Jerusalem, where gunshots were heard next to al-Aqsa Mosque. There still could be some clashes after Friday prayers. It now appears that Friday prayers had just ended. It is, of course, possible that the clashes could be related to excavations carried out by Israel, which started a few days ago at Moor's Gate near the Holy Shrine. At any rate, these pictures are now coming live directly from the Noble Sanctuary in Jerusalem, near al-Aqsa Mosque, where clashes are expected in a protest, or protest escalation, over Israel's continuing excavation work at Moor's Gate, near the al-Aqsa Mosque. Our correspondent has just told us that police forces have intensified their presence around the Sanctuary in an unprecedented manner, in anticipation of possible outbreaks of violence. It was reported that there are about two thousand, five hundred Israeli security men. The Israeli government also decided to install surveillance cameras in the region that broadcast live images over the Internet to ensure that no one tampers with the excavations. These images come to us now live, directly from al-Aqsa Mosque around ... We hear gunfire. It might be from clashes between the congregation and the Israeli soldiers who ... are there now. Of course, these pictures are now live near al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and we now hear continuous gunfire. We will try, of course, to look deeper into these incidents and update you with all the news from there through our correspondent Magdi Al-Halabi shortly, but these are the live images. Shooting seems to be continuing. Our correspondent has reported that excavation work has been suspended today, of course, to minimize sensitivity and tension. And it seems that it will continue on Sunday, so it is only suspended for two days. Then the excavation work will continue, near al-Aqsa Mosque, by Moor's Gate. Magdi is live with us. Magdi, what is happening now? Are we still hearing gunshots?

Magdi: What we are hearing now is gunfire. It appears that tear gas and rubber bullets are being fired to ... inside al-Aqsa Mosque by the Israeli police. It seems there were confrontations with young people or the worshippers, we hear. There we can see the fence. We cannot see what is happening behind the walls. And now we see smoke from the courtyard of al-Aqsa Mosque, from the courtyard of al-Aqsa Mosque. Men ... Many of the police officers who were stationed at Moor's Gate entered suddenly and dramatically. And we started hearing shooting and grenades launching, which you hear now-- smoke bombs, of course, tear-gas bombs. And still, it seems, the clashes between police and worshippers are continuing, but inside the al-Aqsa Mosque, inside the walls, we do not see what is happening, but we hear the sound of gunfire and screaming voices here and there. Also, in other places around the Old City are confrontations between police and Muslim worshippers, who came to conduct Friday prayers in Jerusalem in the blessed al-Aqsa Mosque. The information that we have been able to get is that only between nine thousand and ten thousand worshippers were able to enter al-Aqsa Mosque today. It seems these confrontations started last night at the scene. If that was in fact true, the police have had this information since yesterday. We have received some information that there are many young people who entered the blessed al-Aqsa Mosque at night, and they are the ones carrying out the confrontations. Now we have heard about confrontations near... or in the direction of Moor's Gate away from the place where we stand now but close to "Al-Asbat," The Lions' Gate, which is one of the main gates through which Muslim worshippers enter the al-Aqsa Mosque. Therefore, violent clashes are taking place around the Jerusalem area and inside al-Aqsa Mosque between police and worshippers. This is the situation now, and what we are hearing is sporadic shooting here and there. Yes.

Host: The Chief Palestinian Judge said that today will be a day of outrage after Friday prayers. Can we say that day has already begun?

Magdi: It seems that the tremendous outrage began today after the prayers. Directly after the end of the prayers we heard gunfire and the launching of tear-gas bombs-- immediately after prayers, apparently. And now we hear these bombs again, it seems. Clashes continue inside the shrine, outside the shrine, in the area of the Old City, and at the gate of the Old City. Now I have just received news that there are confrontations at The Lions' Gate, there are confrontations at the Damascus/Nablus Gate, and there are sporadic clashes in other places ... in the Old City and also inside the shrine. We can try to see the place again or ... We saw some smoke-- we do not see it now, but we saw it a little while ago, and we see Moor's Gate from which the police enter into the courtyard of al-Aqsa Mosque in order to disperse the demonstrators. We see here reinforcement police forces around us and also around the Old City. We see them everywhere in police uniforms, and also the secret police deployed everywhere in the Old City. Once again, confrontations are taking place in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque compound, and also outside the walls of the Old City between the demonstrators, between Muslim worshippers and Israeli police whose forces are deployed extensively and in an unprecedented manner, as we said previously.

Host: Magdi, this is not the first time where clashes between Palestinians and Israelis occur over this subject, that being the excavations next to al-Aqsa Mosque and the Holy Shrine. There were also violent clashes in the past.

Magdi : Of course, this is not the first time clashes occur, not only because of the excavation, but also because the al-Aqsa uprising began. The al-Aqsa "Intifada" uprising started here at the Holy Shrine in 2000 when Ariel Sharon, the leader of the opposition at that time, visited and entered the shrine. That's when the al-Aqsa uprising erupted, and then, of course, there were many confrontations that erupted on several occasions: over the excavations, political matters, and other disagreements. But the Jerusalem area is the sensitive area, apparently the most sensitive area in the world, in which many of the confrontations between police and Muslim worshippers continuously occur, even inside the shrine, as is happening now, or outside the shrine and outside the walls of the Old City.

Host: OK, Magdi, politically, we know of the Islamic, Arabic, and Palestinian denunciation of these excavations, but what about Israeli opposition? Who are those that oppose the excavations in Israel, especially in the Israeli government or other governmental institutions?

Magdi: The one who opposes these excavations or denounced it was the Defense Minister, Amir Peretz, and some other official figures that sent private messages to the Prime Minister, urging him to reconsider gradually ceasing the excavation to allow for serious discussion concerning the matter. Somebody said to the Prime Minister, "Why not coordinate the excavations with Jordanian King Abdul II of Jordan, since the al-Aqsa Mosque is a matter that also concerns Jordan?" But the Israeli government seems to be determined to continue and does not want to talk. A close source to the government told me, "They do not want to appear as if they are submitting to Islamic movements and organizations here and there." That this is an Israeli matter and all they are doing is building a bridge, which is the Israeli claim. But the issue is greater than that because, apparently, tensions here are very high, especially since we are talking about the blessed al-Aqsa Mosque, the first of the two "Qiblas" and the third holiest shrine.

Host: Yes, we will go live ... Magdi, of course, stay with us as we continue to follow the events, and we go live on the phone to Mr. 'Akrama Sabri, the preacher at al-Aqsa Mosque, from inside the al-Aqsa Mosque. Mr. 'Akrama, we will ask you first, what is happening now in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque?

'Akrama: Yes, yes. Yes, yes. I am inside the al-Aqsa Mosque. After the completion of al-Sunna prayer, the Israeli army began launching tear-gas bombs and firing bullets of the [...] without justification, without justification, and now there are dozens of wounded. You are probably hearing the sounds of the bombs now.

Host: Yes. We hear it, Mr. 'Akrama.

'Akrama: We call upon the Israeli army and police to leave al-Aqsa Mosque's courtyard. We want them to leave the courtyard of al-Aqsa, because al-Aqsa has its sanctity, al-Aqsa has its sanctity.

Host: Mr. 'Akrama. From the information we received, someone said that there are those who spent the night inside al-Aqsa mosque in order to escalate this today, and to prepare for this day of tremendous outrage.

'Akrama : Yes, the government, the Israeli police originally intended this aggression on al-Aqsa, just as we concluded al-Sunna prayers, and the unabated bombing was launched into the courtyards of al-Aqsa. Dozens are injured and now confined inside al-Aqsa. We request ambulances to go to al-Aqsa to save the wounded.

Host: Is there a large number of wounded, Mr. 'Akrama?

'Akrama: Yes, there are injuries, dozens wounded, but no ambulance here. Please send ambulances.

Host: Yes. Mr., Sheikh 'Akrama, you said that these attempts started by the Israelis and the Israeli army, but were the prayers finished, did you conclude the end of the prayers, today's Friday prayers?

'Akrama: The bombing continues. Listen, listen, my sister, they are still bombing, the bombing is still continuing. This means that there is a violation of the sanctity of al-Aqsa Mosque.

Host: Yes, Sheikh 'Akrama.

'Akrama: Yes, yes. The matter is premeditated. It is premeditated. It is premeditated.

Host: Who is present in the prayer courtyard now? The worshippers? Are the worshippers still present there, or did they leave and scatter?

'Akrama: The worshippers are now inside al-Aqsa, but the army and police had occupied the courtyard and struck with bombs and rubber bullets. Dozens are now wounded. We call on the army to leave ...

Host: Are they still present there now?

'Akrama: ... al-Aqsa courtyard.

Host: Yes. Are they still present there now?

'Akrama: Yes, yes. Listen to the bullets. We say that the matter is a premeditated attack on al-Aqsa Mosque and on the worshippers so that the Jews can implement their plans and demolish the wall of Moors and the dirt mound adjacent to Moor's Gate.

Host: Mr. Sheikh 'Akrama. Israel says it has coordinated with a number of institutions and with the Islamic religious endowment authorities in Jerusalem in this regard. What is your opinion?

'Akrama: This is not true. This is not true. The Islamic religious endowment directorate rejects Israeli actions. The Islamic religious endowment directorate refused any coordination with the occupying Israeli authorities. Do not listen to the Israeli media.

Host: Did you receive a request in this regard?

'Akrama: Yes.

Host: Mr. 'Akrama, Did you receive a request from Israel that it will conduct these excavations, and that it is preparing these excavations?

'Akrama: No, never.

Host: OK, how will you attempt to respond to these excavations, other than, of course, your current positions?

'Akrama: Now there are wounded people and we want to aid them. Please.

Host: Yes. Thank you. Sheikh 'Akrama Sabri, the preacher at al-Aqsa Mosque, was with us live, or via telephone from the courtyard of the al-Aqsa mosque. Gunfire can be heard, as well as clashes. We now go back live to Magdi Al-Halabi in front of al-Aqsa Mosque. Magdi, Sheikh 'Akrama, the preacher

from the al-Aqsa Mosque, says that the soldiers are the ones who entered the mosque and fired tear-gas bombs and started the hostilities. Magdi Al-Halabi, our correspondent, with us live from in front of the al-Aqsa Mosque. These are the live images coming directly from al-Aqsa Mosque, from the front of al-Aqsa mosque, from Jerusalem, and from the holy courtyard. Of course, these protests and this escalation are caused by the excavations being carried out by Israel at al-Aqsa Mosque or in front of or near al-Aqsa Mosque as well as the excavation work at Moor's Gate. Israel continues these excavations, and it seems that there is an escalation in protest movements that began today. Now, only a few minutes ago, the Chief Judge of Palestine said that it will be a day of outrage. It seems that this day has just started. Now, we have heard and are still hearing the shooting continuously. Sheikh 'Akrama, preacher from al-Aqsa Mosque, said that there is an intrusion by Israeli soldiers who entered before the end of prayers. We are now listening to the shots continuing. It appears that these clashes began in the courtyard of al-Aqsa mosque through gunfire. The preacher, preacher from the al-Aqsa Mosque, 'Akrama Sabri, said that the clashes started when Israeli soldiers fired tear-gas before the end of Friday prayers. Magdi Al-Halabi is with us again. Magdi, the preacher from the al-Aqsa Mosque, who is inside the courtyard, told us that the fighting started with Israeli soldiers who fired grenades, tear-gas grenades, before the end of Friday prayers. What information do you have, Magdi?

Magdi: Of course, all of the worshippers who passed by here also say what sheik 'Akrama Sabri said. Some the female worshippers who were there said to us that before they finished the prayer, the Israeli army entered, or the Israeli company entered and started firing bullets and tear gas at worshippers, at the crowd of worshippers there, apparently without reason. This is what we hear from all those who were inside the al-Aqsa Mosque. They are exiting from many doors, and they are staying away from gunfire and tear gas. One older woman that passed by here a few moments ago said to us clearly that it was just after the second prostrations right before the end of the prayer. The police started firing indiscriminately and entered without permission, without any justification. There is no justification for that, because prayer was not over yet. Israeli police said that some of the congregation threw stones at the police. There are many similar stories, but when we were here, the prayers were not over when we started hearing gunfire. We do not know what happened inside the walls. We are waiting for some information and photographs from inside so that we can know exactly what happened.

Host : Magdi, Magdi, Sheikh 'Akrama Sabri was seeking relief and requested ambulances because there were dozens wounded, as he said. Do you hear a bang? Are there ambulances to reach al-Aqsa Mosque?

Magdi: Ambulances can not enter the place where I am standing. The injured or the detained can be brought out through Moor's Gate, but the entry of ambulances has to be from somewhere else. We cannot see, and we cannot remotely even hear sirens of ambulances enter or leave the place. The whole place is surrounded. Here, from Moor's Gate only enters..... The reinforcement police forces enter through here every now and then. We see dozens of police officers entering again towards Moor's Gate and entering the shrine. There is police information reporting, or reported earlier that the police controlled the situation, but we still hear the sound of gunfire. This means that the police do not control the situation there, which continues. It seems to disperse worshippers inside the al-Aqsa Mosque, bearing in mind that the police say there are between nine and ten thousand worshippers inside al-Aqsa Mosque for Friday prayers and thousands of others remain outside the walls. Also, there are confrontations between police and the congregation at Nablus Gate, The Lions' Gate and other sections around the Old City. Yes.

Host: Ok, from what you have heard from the worshippers who left now, is there a large number of people injured?

Magdi: They say that there is a large number of wounded, perhaps dozens wounded. There could be wounded people or those who collapsed on the ground due to gas inhalation. Perhaps they have been wounded by rubber bullets, if there were rubber bullets. They certainly say that there are dozens wounded in the courtyard of the blessed al-Aqsa lying on the ground and waiting for rescue and ambulances to drive them out of the courtyard of al-Aqsa to hospitals for treatment.

Host: Thank you, Magdi. Stay with us. We will follow up moment by moment on what is happening now in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque. Clashes regarding the excavation work at Moor's Gate carried out and continued by Israel. Joining us live now, of course, other guests, but before that, Ra'ed Harmush joins us to follow up on these events.

Ra'ed: Yes. Thank you, Nova. We are following up live on these events from al-Aqsa Mosque, and joining us live from Jerusalem, Mr. Eli Nissan, an Israeli journalist. Mr. Eli, what is your comment on what is happening now in the courtyard and inside the al-Aqsa mosque?

Eli: It is sad what is happening at al-Aqsa Mosque. As far as the events and the police entering al-Aqsa Mosque, however, it was inevitable. Israeli police had no other option than to storm al-Aqsa Mosque after youths threw stones at security forces and the police from inside al-Aqsa. Initially this was not a matter of concern for Israel or the Jerusalem district police. They did not intend to escalate the situation. Unfortunately, there were those who had instigated and ignited conditions. It is unfortunate that we have reached this point, and I hope these events end without leading to any deaths...

Host: On one hand, to what extent can the Israeli excuses towards the excavations be considered? On the other hand, how do you read the coinciding of these operations with the start of the Palestinian talks in Mecca and its concluded agreements?

Eli: I do not believe that there was a link between these situations. Because what happens ... What happened in Mecca is an internal Palestinian affair to stop further bloodshed. The works carried out, the excavation work and construction of the bridge that links the Wailing Wall and Moor's Gate, is not any act by Israel to mess with, God forbid, the Islamic holy shrines and Islamic "Waqf" religious endowment. The archaeological excavations aim to develop the bridge, which unfortunately collapsed several years ago. This bridge or this road, which leads to Moor's Gate from the Western Wall, was in danger of collapsing. This collapse could have led to the deaths of more visitors desiring to visit al-Aqsa Mosque. Therefore, the building of the bridge, and the excavations carried out by Israel today, is not, do not have any relation, and it is not the intention of Israel, God forbid, to interfere with the Islamic holy shrines. Unfortunately, there were factions and elements that used these excavations to incite the Muslim world to wage an Islamic war on Israel. This is wrong, because it should not involve religion; Islam or Judaism in political matters.

Host: Yes, but why didn't Israel take into account the sensitivity of this subject, its form or its timing, and did not take into account what you said in your statement?

Eli: We know that this situation is being debated in the Israeli government and I am also concerned that this issue will be the subject of discussion for the government cabinet next Sunday. There are different points of view among archeologists and even among the politicians. As you know, Prime Minister Olmert is determined to continue the excavations and the Minister of Defense has another view on this subject...

Host: Thank you for your participation. Mr. Eli Nissan, an Israeli journalist, with us live from Jerusalem. We return to our correspondent Magdi Al-Halabi. Magdi, of course, reporting on the new situation. Magdi how does the scene appear now? Are we still hearing gunshots?

Magdi: Of course, you hear the shooting; also, you hear the sound of police cars, which brings a large number of forces to the scene, entering through Moor's Gate and into the courtyard of the Holy Shrine. Clashes continue between Israeli police forces and the al-Aqsa Mosque courtyard. There are dozens of wounded according to eyewitnesses who had left the courtyard of al-Aqsa Mosque. They say that a few minutes, or seconds, before the end of prayers, Israeli police opened fire indiscriminately into the congregation, which led to scores of injuries. Now these clashes continue inside al-Aqsa Mosque. The worshippers inside say that the sanctity of this holy place is violated once more by Israeli police. Also on other fronts of the Old City, at Moor's Gate, at The Lions' Gate, the Damascus Gate, and other gates. There are confrontations between the congregation who were prevented from entering, some of them under the age of forty, forty-five, violent confrontations with the Israeli authorities. The situation is not reassuring at all, as Israeli police continue to disperse the demonstrations, disperse the congregation, shooting tear gas and rubber bullets. Just a few minutes ago we watched the evacuation of a wounded person from inside. It seems a policeman was injured there. This is what we can see from here. The conditions are not good, and we are hearing what is happening inside al-Aqsa Mosque. There are also voices calling for the evacuation of the wounded out of the place, but so far we do not see any ambulance from here at Moor's Gate. We can now see one of the wounded being transferred out through Moor's Gate. As you can see from this section, the police can evacuate the injured, and also transfer the detainees, if there are detainees. This is the place from which the police can transfer prisoners and the wounded. The wounded are possibly members of the police, or perhaps worshippers, but we cannot see nor confirm from here who the wounded are. It is the second or third wounded man to be evacuated through this gate. We see the Israeli police stationed at this section

and reinforcement forces are to enter the courtyard of al-Aqsa, perhaps to support the very, very, very large number of forces already inside.

Host: Magdi, between the protesters and the worshippers, is it possible to have a rough estimate of their numbers?

Magdi: According to Israeli police, the worshippers who were able to enter al-Aqsa Mosque are between nine and ten thousand who entered this Friday. They range in age from five years old to forty years old. This is a very small number compared to regular Friday prayers where there is no tension. This means there are between nine and ten thousand worshippers inside the Shrine, including, of course, the workers of the Islamic "Waqf". Most of those who were there were able to get out through various gates and tried to flee from police gunfire and tear gas. We have heard testimonies from dozens of wounded that the Israeli police started firing indiscriminately, without being pelted with stones from the congregation. However, the Israeli police say that during the hours of the night and early morning there were many young men who entered al-Aqsa Mosque and carried out these actions. That is the story from the Israeli police; we can neither confirm nor deny what they say. This is what can be reported from the two parties: Israel says that the worshippers were throwing stones and the worshippers say that there were no confrontations and police started shooting indiscriminately.

Host: From your observation of the situation on the ground, Magdi, do you observe any kind of Israeli military reinforcement forces, or were the forces there predetermined before the start of these confrontations?

Magdi: Of course, there is reinforcement to these forces. We constantly see additional police forces enter the scene wearing police uniforms. As you can see, these forces now arrived as possible reinforcement for troops stationed here. Police personnel continue to arrive at the courtyard of the Western Wall and the Wailing Wall, in order to enter, of course, the al-Aqsa Mosque through Moor's Gate, which you see here in the picture. That is the situation here in the region-- police reinforcements, the gunfire has now eased slightly, and casualties on the Palestinian side, and perhaps on the part of police also. Yes.

Host: Have the worshippers begun leaving al-Aqsa Mosque, or are they still inside?

Magdi: Some were able to leave the courtyard, and there are those who remain under siege within the courtyard. The situation-- I mean, we cannot talk or know what is happening there. We now see a policeman, apparently a wounded policeman, who was evacuated now. It seems a policeman was injured during the clashes there. This is what we can see from where we stand, and it is possible for the camera to transmit these images. On the other hand, we do not see the wounded worshippers of the Palestinians. We are now seeing very large forces coming, police forces now, and large forces of the border patrol from the Israeli police...

Host: We are still hearing gun shots.

Magdi: There are, of course, interventions, and the firing continues. Forces are getting ready to enter al-Aqsa Mosque. This seems to be an assembly point near us. You see dozens of border guards and police preparing to enter the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque with full equipment via Moor's Gate. The situation is not easy; it's a very difficult, sensitive, and explosive situation inside and outside. We are told by our colleagues and other sources we talked with regarding the situation at Nablus Gate, The Lions' Gate, and other gates, that there are violent clashes between the police and the...

Host: Ok, these forces, which have come to support the already existing troops, and approximately one thousand and five hundred soldiers were there before these support forces. Will all these forces enter al-Aqsa Mosque? Will they arrest people or will they check identifications? What exactly will they do?

Magdi: First, it is not possible to check identifications now. These forces and the police are dispersing the demonstrators, and also carrying out the arrest of those that police believe are behind these clashes. The police are intervening with reinforcement troops. We now see them on their way to Moor's Gate to enter the courtyard to support the troops in and around the Old City. There are about three thousand police and Israeli security men surrounding the Old City. I mean, we can say that there

is a policeman for every square meter. These forces are there to support the troops to continue detainment operations. They are detaining people from the ranks of the congregation in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque to contain the situation; as they say, to control the courtyard and what is going on inside of it at this time, bearing in mind that things got out of everyone's hands, it seems, because the confrontations are not confined to the courtyard; we also heard shooting in different sections of the Old City.

Host: Magdi, thank you, and I hope you stay with us. In the meantime, joining us on the phone from Jerusalem, Mr. Abdul Malik Al-Dahamsha, the former representative of the Islamic movement in the Knesset. Mr. Abdul Malik, what is your read on what is happening now?

Abdul Malik: ***It seems that Israel is still unjust and reckless and wants to shed the blood of Muslims in the courtyard of the shrine today. It seems that the bloodshed is paving the way for the start of the third uprising,*** and everyone has said, and warned Olmert. The Islamic Movement and its offspring have repeatedly said to the Prime Minister, especially in recent weeks, "You have to stop this reckless attack on the sanctity of al-Aqsa Mosque and its sacredness and stop the excavation." This is what happened in 2000 when Sharon entered with the knowledge and coordination of Barak's government to escalate the "Intifada" uprising. This is the second time that a large number of heavily-armed Israeli troops enter to attack the worshippers. I just heard an Al-Hurra correspondent say that there was no attack by the congregation, not on the security forces or the police. What is the justification for these troops that are still deploying, as you have heard, in the courtyard of the Shrine? Do they want to cause more martyrs, more wounded, or more prisoners inside the courtyard of al-Aqsa? What does Israel want from this blessed mosque? What is the sin of the mosque or the worshippers in it?

Host: ***Regardless of the Israeli excuses for such actions, which seem to be unconvincing so far for many of the parties, why, in your opinion, is it happening now?***

Abdul Malik: Israel thought that the Palestinians were in the midst of a civil war before the Mecca agreement yesterday. Israel said Palestinians are preoccupied. The Arab world is also busy with its own weakness and vulnerability, and ***Iraq is under American occupation and under the bloodshed there,*** and the Arab world is in a state of vulnerability. Israel thought that because of this situation it is perhaps the right time to change the current situation here. The established precedent in al-Aqsa Mosque has been as such for a long time, and since the occupation in 1967, Muslims have the full right to enter the courtyards of the Shrine, care for and sponsor it, and also repair any defects therein. Israel now started to reverse and battered this established precedent since 2000. They initially prevented Muslims from conducting any restoration to the courtyard of the Shrine, then, forcefully with guns, allowed Jews and foreigners into the courtyard of al-Aqsa, despite opposition from religious endowments. Now they want to build new sections and continue the digging under the courtyards of the holy mosque, perhaps to undermine its foundations and perhaps to realize the atrocious dream in which al-Aqsa is no longer a mosque but stacked rubble. That is the Israeli version of the story. When they talk about al-Aqsa, they do not refer to it as a mosque or as a holy shrine, they call it the Temple Mount. Note that there is neither a temple nor a mount. These ideas nestle in their minds and in the minds and dreams of zealous Israelis, and they already want to destroy this mosque and build their Temple Mount instead.

Host: In contrast, who is capable today of stopping these reasons, the reasons behind the clashes and thus halt the excavations in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa mosque? I mean, we saw that the Minister of Defense refuses such views, and these views are rejected by a large number of people including you, but who is capable of stopping Olmert today and stopping these excavations?

Abdul Malik: Olmert will stop the excavation when he realizes that he has started a road that only leads to bloodshed and the deterioration of the situation, which was somewhat a settlement with respect to the mosque. This can be achieved by massing the Arab and Islamic people to let Olmert know what kind of a mistake he committed. There is another way, much easier way, that Mr. Bush who has long encouraged Olmert and Israel, and has gone to war for the security of Israel, to notify Olmert and say, "Olmert, enough. There is no need to ignite the fire now again. You have to stop the bulldozers and stop the excavations and withdraw security forces and the Israeli police from inside the courtyard of the al-Aqsa." I am sure that if the matter were serious, Olmert would pull out all of the forces and change the plan of aggression against this horrible plan.

Host: Mr. Abdul Malik, through your readings, do you see in the style and timing of these events an appropriate vessel, so to speak, for the birth of a third "intifada" uprising?

Abdul Malik: Exactly, this is what others beside me say also. I am not the first to have this idea. This is also what history and events have taught us. This is indeed what happened on September 28, 2000, when Sharon entered the courtyard. He was the head of opposition back then. It was on a Thursday, and then the following day, on Friday, like today, just after prayers, Israeli security forces entered and killed Muslim worshippers. There were martyrs and hundreds were wounded. I had then warned the Prime Minister, Mr. Barak, and I said to him, "You have to prevent Sharon from entering the holy courtyard because such an action would ignite a fire that no one can extinguish." We are still at the end or perhaps in the shadow of the uprising of the blessed al-Aqsa. That uprising is being revived now and again, if Israel does not, under American orders, not only the orders of Sharon and Bush only.....

Host: Mr. Abdul Malik, sorry for the interruption. Are there any Arab or Islamic states that are capable of stopping the excavations and thus calming the situation and the clashes between Israelis and Palestinians?

Abdul Malik: This question seems to carry some kind of simplicity. How can Arab and Islamic countries stop the excavation? Should they try to have an effect and subject Olmert to their decisions? Olmert will not be subjected to either an Islamic or an Arabic decision, and these countries will not be able to do it. Perhaps there are some offers and concessions. This is another topic, but if we are talking about diplomatic actions and peaceful procedures, then the only ones who can order Olmert to stop is Bush, the United States, and world public opinion. I am sure that one firm, clear phone call from the White House to Olmert will make this housecat (Olmert) retreat, not as the lion he seems to be. When the United States says "enough" to Olmert, he will retreat and revert back to his senses.

Host: Thank you. Mr. Abdul Malik Al-Dahamsha was with us by phone from Jerusalem. And we return to our correspondent Magdi al-Halabi reporting the latest developments. Magdi stands directly in front of the al-Aqsa Mosque. Magdi.

Magdi : Yes, a few minutes ago some of the worshippers, who were there from the beginning of the confrontations and during the confrontations, which started half an hour ago, told us that there were dozens of wounded and detainees inside al-Aqsa Mosque. We hear some news coming from here and there that clashes continue not only in the Old City of Jerusalem, but there are also clashes at the Qalandia checkpoint near Ramallah, in the vicinity of the Al-Ram. There are clashes in many areas between Palestinians and Israelis. Things began to deteriorate more than in recent days. Now shooting has stopped inside al-Aqsa Mosque. We have seen many dozens of policemen and reinforcements come to the courtyard of the Wailing Wall, the Western Wall, in order to enter the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque compound. It seems...We saw a detainee being transported out of Moor's Gate. He seems to be over the age of fifty, as far as we can tell from where we stand. This means the police did not detain young men inside the al-Aqsa Mosque. This is what we have seen up to this moment. We do not know what will happen shortly. The police are preparing for entry; reinforcement forces to enter the courtyard of the holy mosque in order to extricate the injured policemen and to bring out those detained from the congregation who were detained by police during the final moments. A short time ago the situation had eased. I mean, the shooting inside eased, as I understood from one of the police sources who claimed that they have the situation under control, but we can not verify this at all.

Host: Magdi, do you have any information on the worshippers who were wounded in the al-Aqsa courtyard? Were they evacuated? Were they aided?

Magdi: It seems they have exited through a gate other than Moor's Gate. They are evacuating the injured who are in pain and who suffered wounds caused by the tear gas canisters, perhaps by batons, or by rubber bullets, from confrontations with police. They are leaving the place in ambulances via another way. This is what we have been able to hear or know concerning this matter. We do not hear the sound of sirens. This is what we can see now. The situation now is that the police are gathering in an area in back so that they can enter and get the detainees.

Host: Yes, Magdi. We are receiving live images of the wounded. They appear to be worshippers. We are now watching live. These are the images that come to us concerning what is happening from clashes between worshippers and Israeli soldiers as a result of the excavations conducted in front of Moor's Gate. Of course ... Yes, yes, Magdi.

Magdi: You can see the forces are now trying to enter through Moor's Gate. The reinforcement forces that came here are now entering through Moor's Gate to the holy al-Aqsa Mosque where the worshippers are gathered inside. As I understood from a police source, they want to complete the arrests and detainment operations begun by Israel. Dozens of people, as we are told, are in the courtyard. They are suspected to have started the confrontations with Israeli forces. There are other forces trying to enter from another place, not through this gate. There are several gates used by the policemen to enter the Holy Shrine. We see behind me reinforcement forces still coming continuously as they are dispatched over here to strengthen the forces that are already there, perhaps to control the situation more. We are also seeing an ambulance entering the place. That is in addition to the intensive ambulances belonging to police that have been here since morning in anticipation. Apparently, they took into account all events that could occur between the ranks of the police. We saw two or three of them coming out, and also some ... Now we are seeing one of the detainees. We can see a worshipper detained, and he seems over the age of forty. It is unlikely this person was involved in the clashes, but apparently he was arrested by the police inside. They are taking him and directing him to the police station near the site. This is the situation now in this region. The situation is somewhat out of control, but the police once again are poised to enter the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque with reinforcement forces and with additional troops. Yes.

Host: I wanted to ask you, what about these forces? You said that since morning there have been nine thousand worshippers who came to the mosque and they were inside, or are inside the courtyard. In turn, how many soldiers are there now between those who were present this morning and the reinforcement troops?

Magdi: I tell you, about three thousand police officers found in the city of Jerusalem. All of these forces are scattered around the city. I mean, all the forces that were here since morning have now entered the courtyard of the Mosque and more reinforcement soldiers came. About two hundred or two hundred and fifty additional troops came to Moor's Gate in particular for entry. There are also additional troops at other gates...

Host: Thank you very much, Magdi. Sorry for the interruption. Always stay with us, of course, to follow up on these events taking place in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque. With us now on the phone live, Mr. Amr Moussa, Secretary of the Arab League. Mr. Amr, how do you view this situation as you are watching it live? How can we talk now about these clashes, which are taking place in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque between worshippers and Israeli soldiers?

Amr Moussa: It is clear that Israel is reverting to these unacceptable practices that are condemned in the holy places and the occupied Palestinian territories. That points to the absence of clear or real intentions to establish genuine peace. What is happening in Jerusalem now would lead to many consequences and to assert that the Israeli government or Israeli policy is not directed at achieving peace or at any movement towards a just peace with the Palestinians.

Host: Mr. Secretary-General. Some people talk of the beginning of the third uprising "intifada".

Amr Moussa: Look. **There is no need to talk about uprising. What is important is that the Palestinians, as the rightful owners of this land, cannot accept the occupation.** The Palestinian reaction is a very natural response, and what Israel is doing is totally unacceptable. From this angle, I would like to tell you, that not only the Palestinians, but also the Arab world, the Islamic world, and any political entity that continues to respect international laws, the existing international system, or the new system, cannot afford such practices and such a serious breach of human rights and serious violations of international law. **All this is caused because of what is being giving to Israel in terms of protection and immunity from international law.**

Host: But, how is it possible to stop what is now happening, and...

Amr Moussa: I think that the Security Council has to oppose this immediately. Since Israel does not care so much, at least the principal system responsible for maintaining security and peace for the Palestinians must oppose this. I believe that a large number of Arab and Islamic countries will opt for this route.

Host: Concerning this intervention and this route, Mr. Secretary-General, a little while ago, Mr. Abdul Malik Dahamsha, a representative of the Islamic Movement in the Knesset, was with us earlier. I

asked him about the role of Arab States and the role of Islamic countries in bringing a halt to the excavations and thus a halt to the clashes. He described my question as an oversimplification since it is not possible for Arab and Islamic States to have a role in stopping Olmert.

Amr Moussa: No, everything is possible. I believe that this irritation or provocation and the actions of the Israeli occupation must be stopped. We must take it to the Security Council because it is the Council who is responsible for maintaining international peace and security. This is a threat to peace and a threat to security in the region.

Host: Who are the authorized States or the authorized powers that can submit a report or a request to the Security Council?

Amr Moussa: Arab countries, Islamic countries, any state interested in international law and paying attention to stability in the world. Allowing the Israeli policy infringements to this extent will affect stability in the region. It is clear that they have no intention of peace. If we consider what is happening today in Jerusalem and add that to the continuation of building settlements, all these actions are not good signs at all.

Host: Yes, but your Excellency Secretary-General, while taking things to the Security Council, these mechanisms and measures, as you know, of course, are lengthy procedures and measures. Who could stop this situation on the ground now?

Amr Moussa: Well, the one who could stop this situation is someone who has a direct and supporting relationship with Israel. Israel's attention needs to be drawn to the detriment of all the peace opportunities and that this is damaging the stability in the region...

Host: The United States, for example?

Amr Moussa: Yes..?

Host: The United States, for example?

Amr Moussa: The United States and all who are trying to reach the peace process must take a critical stand against these illegal actions, which raise many obstacles. The Quartet needs to express its views and clarify its position on this grave breach of all of the needed components for peace talk resumption.

Host: Do you believe the timing of these Israeli operations is innocent, as Israel claims?

Amr Moussa: No, no. There is no such a thing as innocent or not innocent. Because I tell you that you must add this to what is happening and the settlements that are going on, as well as what is happening by the Wall. If we take it as an isolated procedure, it can be innocent or not innocent, but to connect it and track all Israeli actions, they are not indicative of peace.

Host: In contrast to this question, there are those who said that the Palestinians gave such great importance to these excavations to cover the events in Gaza and the exploitation of the situation.

Amr Moussa: No, because now after what took place in Jeddah of reconciliation and the formation of a unity government and Palestinian reconciliation is itself proof that contradicts what you are saying.

Host: Then there are people who are trying to influence the positive outcome of this agreement which emerged from Mecca?

Amr Moussa: Israeli policy itself is not directed towards that purpose but towards the peace process as a whole.

Host: Is that possible if you are in one way or another familiar with all the details of the Mecca meetings and you know the resolve of the agreement so far-- Can the unyielding positive Palestinian position really be shaken or somewhat destabilized?

Amr Moussa: It is possible that some treacherous actors are intervening again to try to drive a wedge and disrupt the peace, an attempt to hinder the movement of any steps toward even a small revival of the peace process. Of course, we do not leave out the possibility that these malignant actors will try again. But the Palestinians should be aware of that.

Host: Your Excellency Secretary-General. We heard earlier that Hamas will not recognize Israel despite the signed agreements. What is your comment and...

Amr Moussa: Listen, listen. Leave this talk. How? How can a movement recognize a State? Recognition must be mutual between Palestine and Israel...

Host: But it is the government.

Amr Moussa: Yes?

Host: The movement now, Hamas, is the Palestinian government.

Amr Moussa: Then why is the government besieged? And the people are starving, why? The Hamas government is now required to confirm its commitment to the Arab peace initiatives only. This is what we see. Whether it is more than this, there should be similar measures by the Israelis. ..

Host: Western countries are demanding more than this.

Amr Moussa: Listen, the commitment of any Palestinian government is confirmed only by implementation, respect, and commitment to the Arab peace initiatives in Beirut 2002. That is it.

Host: Yes. Thanks, your Excellency the Secretary-General. Amr Moussa, Secretary General of the Arab League. Thank you for your participation.

Host: We now turn to the phone. Live with us, our guest Mr. Ekmal Ed-Din Hussein Aughlu, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Action from Jeddah. Mr. Ekmal, how are you following these clashes between the Israelis and the Palestinian worshippers in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque due to Israeli excavations?

Ekmal Ed-Din: First, we strongly condemn all that is happening there. This exceeded all international laws and international agreements. This is incompatible with Israel's responsibility as an occupier of that place. We ask the United Nations and the Security Council to intervene in this matter. I am in constant contact with the permanent Member States. I had also a detailed meeting with President Mahmoud Abbas here, the day before yesterday, while attending a meeting in Mecca. We also had a secondary meeting focusing on this subject. First, I call on the international community and on countries that have some influence over Israel to use their influence to stop these attacks. This is a great responsibility. It is unjust of the international States to apply pressure on Hamas and ask Hamas to stop its operations and not request from Israel that it stop its flagrant aggressions. The second point, I went to the Director-General of the UNESCO, a week ago. I was with the UNESCO, and asked the Islamic Group in the UNESCO, after addressing the Director-General of the UNESCO to intervene to stop the excavations and to intervene to stop the construction and alteration of historic nature. We believe that there is considerable international responsibility. Israeli public opinion itself is divided on the issue. The Israeli government must comply with the demands of the Palestinian people and the

aspirations of the international community, and respect the Islamic nation and its sacred shrines, otherwise we cannot predict what the reaction will be.

Host: Mr. Ekmal Ed-Din, Israel says that these are archaeological excavations, regardless of the intent behind this issue. By the time there is a major international action to stop this work, Israel would have already reached what it wants. In your opinion, what is Israel hiding behind these excavations?

Ekmal Ed-Din: I think that this is all unjustified, because this excavation threatens the foundations of the al-Aqsa Mosque. Secondly, there is no historical evidence for these allegations. The city of East Jerusalem is under occupation. The Israeli occupation forces must abide by international conventions and respect the nature of the place. This place does not concern Muslims only, it concerns both Muslims and Christians. I wish that the Vatican would move in on this subject. We ask the Pope to react and also use his influence in this matter just like he would use his influence in other matters.

Host: Yes. Mr. Ekmal Ed-Din, you said that you have contacted and are contacting Arab and Islamic States. From those countries you contacted, was there any State that is willing to submit a request to the Security Council of the United Nations to stop the excavation and thus stop this violence?

Ekmal Ed-Din: These contacts are ongoing. I contacted the Chairman of the Islamic Summit, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, by sending him a letter, and these communications are underway. When we reach a certain point or a certain result, we will announce that.

Host: Yes. OK, is there any influence of the Arab organizations? Do you expect there is an impact or effect on Israel from your organization, or the Arab League, or any other organization that is often working to calm the situation?

Ekmal Ed-Din: Let me correct a small comment you made. The Organization of the Islamic Conference is not an Arab organization. It is an Islamic organization comprised of fifty-seven countries including the twenty-two Arab States, which are members of the Arab League, and many of the Asian and African States.

Host: Yes. Does it have an impact on bringing a halt to the excavation or calming the situation now?

Ekmal Ed-Din: Of course, we are working towards this. We will continue in our efforts to calm the situation, at the same time preserving the Palestinian right to this land and also standing against Israeli attacks.

Host: Mr. Ekmal Ed-Din, let me turn to a subject that is somewhat similar. You now live in Jeddah. Did you closely participate in the talks between Fatah and Hamas, and the agreement they have reached?

Ekmal Ed-Din: You know we have started a dialogue between the two sides in mid-December, and I took a shuttle between Gaza, Ramallah, and Damascus and met with Mr. Abbas, Mr. Haniya, and Mr. Mashaal, the leader of Hamas Movement, on several occasions. I believe that this initiative, which was the first of its kind to break the ice between the two sides, opened the dialogue between them and built some confidence. Then the higher caliber initiatives of the Saudi Monarch, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, came to completion in such a short period and we welcome it. I had been in contact with the parties concerned. There was a meeting between them and me in Jeddah while they were en route to Mecca. In Jeddah we had great understanding, and thank God that these talks reached the intended purpose that was expected by the Islamic nation and the Palestinian people.

Host: Yes. Mr. Ekmal Ed-Din, I have tried through my question to provoke a gateway to a particular topic which is the Hamas movement's announcement a few moments ago that it does not recognize Israel, despite all signed agreements, and also the agreement signed in Mecca. Why now, in light of the current events at al-Aqsa Mosque?

Ekmal Ed-Din: First, we must ask Hamas about this and not the person responsible for Hamas. Let us discuss this idea. Why ask just one side to recognize the other side? Why doesn't Israel recognize

Palestine, the rights of the Palestinians, and respect their rights to life, and respect international law which prevents them from raiding Palestinian territories and the demolition of their sanctuaries?

Host: Yes. If, in your opinion, ***who is behind the attempt to sabotage the situation on the ground*** in the Palestinian territories in one way or another, whether through...

Ekmal Ed-Din: I do not understand the question.

Host: I tried to read through your answer ***about the timing of the Israeli operations***, which of course, Israel concluded that such practices will result in a reaction, as seen now on the ground. Why choose this timing?

Ekmal Ed-Din: Yes. I think that your observation has its significance.

Host: Yes. We await your answer, Mr. Ekmal Ed-Din.

Ekmal Ed-Din: I understand that you say that Israel wants to delay this agreement.

Hosts: Yes.

Ekmal Ed-Din: This is a valid and smart point.

Host: Thank you. Mr. Ekmal Ed-Din Hussein Aughlu, Secretary-General of the Islamic Conference Organization, spoke to us via telephone from Jeddah. Now we return to our correspondent Magdi al-Halabi. Magdi is following the situation on the ground in front of the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque. Has the calm atmosphere returned, perhaps ease of tensions and confrontations, Magdi?

Magdi: Of course, in the final moments, clashes eased in the holy shrine, in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque compound. However, there are confrontations elsewhere in the Old City, to disperse the demonstrations and detain young men, as well as the release of tear gas and rubber bullets. Now Israeli forces continue to send reinforcement troops to the region who enter the courtyard of the Shrine through Moor's Gate. We see it very clearly in terms of where we stand here, near Moor's Gate next to the Western Wall, the Wailing Wall. The situation here, I mean, the police say that the situation is under Israeli control in the Shrine. A little bit ago, we saw the Inspector-General of Police come to the region, and he is now making statements to the press. In a little bit we will obtain some information from the press conference held by the Inspector-General of Police, Moshe Karadi, in the courtyard of the Wailing Wall right behind me. The police also continue to bring detainees and also the wounded through their position at Moor's Gate to the ambulances behind me. It can be said that the events in the al-Aqsa Mosque are now abated. There is calm, as it seems, and control over the situation at this time. They started evacuating wounded Palestinians out of the courtyard of the Shrine in one form or another through other gates. One of the worshippers told us that they were crowded into a room and the door was shut minutes before the end of prayers. The shooting began and they were unable to escape to see what was happening, but they were able later after things calmed down, to get out through other gates there. They are saying that the police suddenly came to the congregation and began firing into crowds of worshippers, whose numbers are estimated, according to Israeli police, between nine and ten thousand worshippers who entered the al-Aqsa Mosque. Yes.

Host: Do you know the number of the victims and casualties on the Israeli side and also on the side of the worshippers?

Magdi: So far there is no final tally. There are no confirmed figures, but they are talking about dozens, perhaps less than that, are wounded Palestinians, and some of the wounded are from the police ranks. So far there are no confirmed official figures from either the police or the Religious Endowment "Waqf". Recognizing that the situation started less than an hour ago, therefore, it would be premature to be talking about final figures, bearing in mind that there will be subsequent injured transported to the hospital. These figures are always growing, and we hope that there will not be any casualties among the worshippers who are there. We have heard that there was only wounded in the al-Aqsa Mosque.

Host: Yes, Magdi, we have not heard any gunfire for a period of time. I mean, things calmed down. Did the reinforcement forces enter the courtyard of al-Aqsa Mosque now?

Magdi: Of course, the forces you saw before have entered the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque, and still continue to enter the courtyard. Perhaps it's reinforcement forces for the continuation and completion of detention operations in the region. In the courtyard of the Shrine, there are many group detainments and dozens of detainees from the congregation to the point that they need large forces in order to control the site on one hand, and transfer the detainees and transport the injured on the other hand.

Host: Yes, Magdi. We now have the first images of the clashes inside al-Aqsa Mosque, and we see it now with our viewers. These are, of course, the first images that we get of the initial clashes. And, of course, we see the launching of tear-gas bombs. The Israeli soldiers...

Magdi: We heard this... We heard shooting, but we have not been able to see what is happening. You are now watching what some colleagues taped inside the courtyard. Of course, these images are not easy to watch. We can see how the police opened fire and tear-gas and rubber bullets at worshippers, and perhaps without motivation, as we understood from the congregation. Police say that stones were thrown at security forces. We have not been able to see it from here because of the fence separating us from the courtyard of the Shrine. We can only see Moor's Gate, and the entry of Israeli forces from there. I mean, we can all see these somewhat harsh images.... Yes.

Host: Magdi, stay with us as we follow with you all the happenings, of course, live on the ground between the Palestinians and the congregation. We will continue to follow this special.

Host: Yes. In the meantime, Ms. Amira Aaron, a spokeswoman for the Israeli Foreign Ministry, joins us on the phone. Ms ... Yes, she speaks to us from Jerusalem. Ms. Aaron, many observers, Palestinians and Arabs, who are following-up, consider what happened as a major threat that could lead to the third uprising. Is this what you are working toward?

Amira Aaron: No, of course not. We do not understand why we hear these extremist statements, and all Muslims who are now in this place, at al-Aqsa on the Temple Mount know that Israel would not take any step against this sensitive place to both Muslims and Jews. Al-Aqsa Mosque should not be at risk. Regrettably, there are statements from extremist views in Israel and in Palestinian areas. They want to shape these acts of vandalism and use them to escalate a third uprising, as you have said. Of course, we want to prevent that, and we want to say repeatedly, that the work we do is repair work only. We do not want anything in this holy place...

Host: But, Ms. Aaron, you are conducting these excavations in that place, which, as you have said, is very sensitive and raises all these reservations. The worshippers today were at the mosque and left peacefully to express their disapproval. You transformed this disapproval into anger, confrontation, and bloodshed.

Amira Aaron: No, this is not true. Regrettably, those who were here today, and came to perform Friday prayers, began throwing stones at the Jewish holy place and the Wailing Wall. Therefore, we will not give them such an opportunity. They are seeking any opportunity, as I said, to escalate and cause the escalation of events at this place.

Host: There is a certain reality on the ground, in light of this escalation. We are not talking about which side started. Why not stop this matter?

Amira Aaron: We must do the restoration work, because this site is very important.

Host: But why not postpone this matter to a later date? You postpone the matter to a later date then work through some of the designated entities for coordination?

Amira Aaron: That is correct, and this is logical. But, regrettably, there is no logic in the work of extremists who are always looking for a reason to escalate events in this place and want to transfer all

power and all authority to Jerusalem. Of course, there are political and public wills trying to exploit this place and this work of restoration. This repair work is only to achieve unacceptable extremist political objectives. We are conducting restoration, because, God forbid, a collapse could happen in this place, and we would hear once again that Israel is accused and internationally criticized, and we are trying to prevent that.

Host: Ok, Ms. Amira, despite the importance of these excavations, as you said, that could threaten the fall of the bridge, but even within the Israeli government there is a conflict, and they do not share the same views. Amir Peretz called for a halt to such excavations. He is the Minister of Defense, and he knows that the excavation can be dangerous. We now can see the danger from the clashes between worshippers and Israeli soldiers. Why was the opposition's opinion not considered?

Amira Aaron: We are a democracy. There is room for different ideas. Every Minister and every member of the Knesset has an opportunity to express his ideas and talk about them with the Prime Minister, but there is an official stance. I say again, there was a very necessary need for such restoration work because, just like I said, in 2004 the bridge collapsed as a result of rain. That is why we must do the restoration work. We will not change anything in that place and the repairs are now outside al-Aqsa and the Temple Mount.

Host: Ms. Aaron, you still circling around one point and did not give a specific answer. My colleague asked you concerning the stance within the government. She spoke of the Minister of Defense, not just any opinion in the Israeli public.

Amira Aaron: Okay, I said that the Minister of Defense has the opportunity to talk about that with the Prime Minister, I do not want to touch on the news we saw in the newspaper "Haaretz" a day or two ago. I say that there is an official stance. And I want to explain why, what is behind this situation. It is a very important security requirement. We want all the tourists and visitors who step through Moor's Gate to the Holy Shrine to be safe. We do not want it to collapse, God forbid.

Host: Ok, Ms. Aaron, you do not want it to collapse, but it is a historic site and you fear its collapse. However, there is an Israeli archaeologist who confirmed that the archaeological area is not threatened with collapse. Hence the reason you offer has no basis of truth. To the contrary, these excavations are what might cause the collapse of the place not keeping it as it is now.

Amira Aaron: We hear these statements, and unfortunately they are not true, and we know that it comes from the Islamic religious endowment "Waqf", and also the Islamic groups...

Host: This is an Israeli archaeologist, Madam, he is an Israeli archaeologist.

Amira Aaron: We have the Israeli Antiquities, and thank God we have good engineers experienced in this field. They know what we need to do in this place. They gave us their professional opinion of the need for repair work in the place. Unfortunately, as I said, there are extremist political factions that would like to turn this escalation into an uprising, God forbid. We will not give them that opportunity. Thank God, there is now calm. I am in the Holy Shrine because Israeli police are negotiating with the Directorate of Religious Endowment. And I say that al-Aqsa Mosque is in no danger.

Host: Ms. Aaron, you say that in the end Israel will continue what it is doing on the ground, regardless of the intentions Israel continues.

Amira Aaron: I did not hear the question, sorry.

Host: Yes, in the end, I was asking you, we are trying to get some clear answers. Is Israel going ahead with the work regardless of the results on the ground?

Amira Aaron : We hope that the Palestinian side, the Islamic Waqf in the Holy Shrine, and also the Islamic movement, the so-called Islamic Movement in the green line, who of course do not recognize the State of Israel, no matter who the Israelis are, we hope they will begin to calm down and start dialogues and negotiations. We will be able to give them all the details on this work. As you know and

have seen, this work continues with full transparency; there is coverage of the Arab and foreign media broadcasting such work. We do not hide these acts, because there is no risk of any manipulation to any of the places there at this sensitive and important site.

Host: OK, Ms. Amira, are you not worried that you might risk or jeopardize your relations with friendly or moderate countries because of this excavation? Are you ready to sacrifice relations with the Arab and Islamic countries because of excavations at Moor's Gate?

Amira Aaron: No, of course not. We continue to communicate and the Minister had started meeting with the Foreign Ministers and senior officials of the Arab and Islamic countries to explain the Israeli position and give them details about this business. They know that there isn't anything new. Israel continues to respect this place for the 40th year. This place is under Israeli sovereignty. As you know, the site has evolved, thank God, and you see that now the site is in good condition, as it continues to...

Host: Yes. Ok. These communications that you are conducting with some countries, why was it not from the outset? Why didn't you communicate with the Arab and Islamic countries to explain to them the excavation and therefore they could participate or coordinate with you so that we wouldn't reach this point of clashes that we now see?

Amira Aaron: true. This question is important. As I said, the details are not in my hands. I know that we informed the concerned authorities in the site, for example, the Islamic Waqf, Religious Endowment, on the motivation and the requirement of these acts of restoration. This matter was known to them.

Host: Ok, you Ms. Aaron know that coordination with the concerned authorities should have been done before what happened today on the ground. Why hasn't there been an announcement for at least a temporary halt to the excavation to rectify the situation on the ground and for things to take on other forms?

Amira Aaron: We continue of course to follow these events and this subject and we know the sensitivity of this site and this issue. We will see what will become of this in the coming week. As you know ,today we did not conduct any restoration work out of respect for Muslims worshipers who came to the Holy Shrine, and because of that we did not carry on any work today...

Host: Yes, Madam. Thank you very much Ms. Amira Aaron, a spokesman for the Israeli Foreign Ministry, of course, thank you very much for your participation with us as we cover the clashes taking place in the courtyard of al-Aqsa Mosque.

Host: Yes, And now joining us Mr. Fawzi Barhum, a spokesman for Hamas, who is with us from Gaza. Mr. Barhum, what is your take on what is happening now? I think you were listening to what the spokeswoman for the Israeli Foreign Ministry said as she has cast the blame on the Palestinian side in these confrontations.

Fawzi Barhum : First in name of God the Merciful, **this is not the first time the Israeli occupation uncovers the veil on the Israeli plan to destroy al-Aqsa Mosque** and the establishment of the so-called The Temple of Solomon structure. Therefore, they planned to destroy al-Aqsa Mosque this time. There are Israeli books that discuss Israel between the past and the future which portrays al-Aqsa as being destroyed. The destruction starts at Moor's Gate. The same place in which the Israeli bulldozers were demolishing today. There is a clear arrangement to destroy al-Aqsa Mosque and a clear plan to begin the destruction today. Hence, what is happening today is that the Palestinian public came to the rescue of this mosque. This mosque is a historic site, an Islamic site, and a site of civilization. It is the first of the two "Qiblas", the third holiest shrine, and the second mosque. Thus it is a symbol of a central Islamic orientation, whether Palestinian, Arab or Muslim. **Thus the endowed public response is a natural reaction to the occupation's intentions for further destruction.** That's in addition to what was burned in sixty-nine, the massacre in 2000, and the beginning of today's attempt to begin the demolition of al-Aqsa Mosque. Thus, the Israeli assume full responsibility of what is going on from injuries and fierce Israeli onslaught of our people and our brothers there in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque. The Hamas movement will not sit idly by in the face of this attack. We will serve the national interest and defend this Islamic site one of the sites of our people and our Arab culture.

Host: Yes. Mr. Barhum, also Mrs. Aaron, said that Israel had suspended excavation operations today taking into account the sensitivity of the day, Friday. We know that tomorrow's Jewish holiday and a meeting of the Israeli government is on Sunday. Do you expect the announcement of even a temporary halt to these actions, and if this did happen, will that please you?

Fawzi Barhum: the Israeli occupation does not respect the sanctity and sacredness of Friday or any holidays, nor the sanctity of the holy places. Israel does not even take into account the feelings of Muslim people. Today our brothers rose in opposition in the West Bank and the people of forty eight, rose up to support al-Aqsa mosque. Today the occupation couldn't access the restoration site because they were exposed in the media when they started attacking, beating the worshippers, firing live bullets and gas, and arresting many of the sons of our Palestinian people. Suspension of demolition does not mean cancellation, and thus the suspension is partial only until the people leave from the sanctuary. They use it to improve their image for world media and to appear as if they respect the sanctity of Muslim worshippers, and the sacredness of Friday. The occupation reveals its criminal atrocities on its own; they committed a similar massacre, on a Friday as well back in 1969, which was the burning of al-Aqsa Mosque as well. Therefore, we do not rely on their comments, but they in fact must refrain from any prejudice toward al-Aqsa Mosque. Otherwise the land will be aflame with Palestinian resistance that sponsors a free, honorable, and wholesome resistant project in defense of al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam, and Palestine.

Host: Mr. Barhum, the excavation began and coincided with the start of Palestinian talks in Mecca. Today it takes on this form, which brings about these confrontations following the announcement of the agreement between the two Palestinian sides. **How do you view the simultaneity of these operations and what happened in Mecca?**

Fawzi Barhum: **Of course the Israeli occupation wants to buy some time and win the attention of the world away from Mecca to confuse the Palestinian arena.** Unfortunately, it also exploits the Islamic Arab silence, on official and popular levels, towards the ongoing demolition, or the beginning of the demolition of al-Aqsa Mosque. Therefore it has already become clear that Europe supports the occupation and also a clear European-American foreign agenda that supports the occupation along with Arab silence concerning the ongoing demolition of al-Aqsa Mosque. Only the Palestinian people are defending al-Aqsa Mosque and the sanctity of Islam and Muslims. The Occupation is already utilizing the existing state of stagnation in the international arena, which did nothing until this moment.

Host: Since we are talking about Mecca, and the Mecca agreement between Hamas and Fatah, there was a statement issued earlier by your side, which rejected the agreements signed with Israel or even former recognition of Israel. We of course followed some of the details of this agreement in Mecca on the formation of the national government, which is contrary to the issued statement. What do you say?

Fawzi Barhum: First, no one from the meeting in Mecca required of Hamas or Fatah or any other Palestinian faction to recognize the Occupation. This matter was not suggested in context of the dialogues and negotiations in Mecca. The consensus between the Hamas movement and the Fatah movement were concerning the formation of a government of national unity on both the ministerial and political sides. The political side is the program of the government which depends on the Palestinian National Accord document and the letter of assignment, and certain things were added stating that the Palestinian government has to respect commitments and agreements signed by the PLO, the international commitments signed by the organization, and therefore respect the commitments signed by the Palestine Liberation Organization. As long as it does not detract from the rights of the Palestinian people, this is very clear; all agreements which do not detract from the rights of our Palestinian people will be respected by the Palestinian government to come. And thus we overcome this issue, and the adoption of the government's program on the basis of the Palestinian National Accord and the letter of assignment, which was approved by the Hamas and the Fatah movement and head of the Authority and the Prime Minister there in Mecca.

Host: Of course, everyone talked about the great achievements made in Mecca, **but is this sufficient to lift the siege of the government?**

Fawzi Barhum: I believe that what's new is that we have agreed as Palestinians and through Palestinian efforts and without any foreign agendas. This was the fruit of compromise. In a few short days the Palestinian National Accord document was signed and the formation of the Palestinian government was formed on the basis of that document. Therefore, we concluded without foreign agendas or interventions in the Palestinian reality, and the Palestinian Authority is the proof of that.

Host: Thank you. Thank you Mr. Fawzi Barhum, has been with us from Gaza, the spokesman for the Hamas movement.

Host: We still continue this special coverage of the al-Aqsa Mosque events. Mr. Mickey Rosenfield, spokesman for the Jerusalem police, is speaking with us live from Jerusalem. Mr. Mickey, there is a big disagreement regarding how the clashes started. You say that some of the congregation started by throwing stones, but some of the fleeing worshippers say that you started the attack by launching tear-gas bombs.

Mickey Rosenfield: After the prayers concluded around 12 noon, the riots started. Some of these acts were carried out here and we were forced to enter the courtyard. The police were prepared to deal with this situation since yesterday. After all the incitements which took place during prayer time, it was natural that these acts occur and all policemen in Jerusalem are dealing with the situation now. I can also confirm that the situation is now calmer after police used force to deal with the rioters. One hundred and fifty of them were still inside the mosque and the police did not enter the mosque, but are dealing with the situation to put an end to these actions and the authorities will continue to carry out their work in this area.

**Host: Why the bloody nature of this confrontation? Was it not possible to avoid this?**

Mickey Rosenfield: The local police and the general police evaluated the situation yesterday. We have three thousand, five hundred police elements east of Jerusalem, and at the gates to the Old City; and since Tuesday night there were two thousand and five hundred policemen carrying out work and patrols to deal with the situation in Jerusalem.

**Announcer: Sir, there were intensive procedures before Friday prayers which you have prepared for a few days ago to calm the situation. One of these conditions was that no one under the age of forty-five years old was allowed in the courtyard, and women only. I mean, can this be seen as an attack against the elderly and women?**

Mickey Rosenfield: For us, the men who were allowed to enter were older than forty-five. All women were allowed to enter to pray, but after the incitement which happened at the end of the prayers, the riots started. And of course the police have to deal with the rioters and those who carry out such work. It is necessary.

Host: Mr. Rosenfield, you are saying there are some clashes still continuing inside the Shrine. Does this mean that the amount of arms inside the Shrine is that significant? Can you estimate that?

Mickey Rosenfield: First, with regards to the number of persons within the mosque, there are about one hundred and fifty young people. Some are leaving the region. The police will remain in place as long as necessary to deal with the rioters. When everyone leaves, the police will also leave. We will evaluate the situation and act as necessary.

Host: Ok, what is the number of detainees you have arrested so far and what is the number of wounded among the Israeli soldiers?

Mickey Rosenfield: Fifteen members of the police and the border police were injured from the stone throwing. Some were evacuated to hospitals in Jerusalem for treatment; they all suffered minor injuries. Seventeen Arabs were arrested because they had rioted.

**Host: Okay, what about the victims on the part of the worshippers? It seems that there are dozens.**

Mickey Rosenfield: No, this is not true. There were some people who were injured, but there are no serious injuries or anything else.

**Host: I mean, are there at least ambulances, were the wounded treated, or are they now still in the mosque?**

Mickey Rosenfield: there are medical teams in the region and in East Jerusalem that can deal with each of the injured from the police or rioters, but so far the situation is under full control, the situation is calm, the police are present everywhere necessary, and we will continue to do our work.

Host: But, Mr. Rosenfield, you say that the situation was under control completely, but there are those who talked about some disturbances and clashes in some other regions, including the Qalandia checkpoint, and this perhaps extends to other areas. How is the situation under full control then?

Mickey Rosenfield: These skirmishes were far from the area of East Jerusalem, and not in the area adjacent to the mosque. There were some confrontations in the Arab neighborhoods, but limited, and as I said before, we are confronting this situation and will continue to do so to control it fully.

Host: Mr. Mickey Rosenfield, spokesman for the Jerusalem Police, was with us live from Jerusalem, thank you very much. And of course we continue this special coverage. Mr. Saleh Zeidan is with us on the phone. He is a member of the political office of the Democratic Front. Mr. Saleh, how do you follow the situation now and these clashes, which seemed to have calmed down a little?

Saleh Zeidan: Jerusalem is the spirit of the Palestinian people. What is happening in the heart of the city of Jerusalem at al-Aqsa Mosque along with the excavation provokes feelings of patriotism in all the Palestinian people. This is not only a provocation by the Israeli occupation of religion, but is a direct attack on the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem. This provokes the energies and strength of the Palestinian people to confront it. What we are seeing and what we have seen today is the condemnation of the Palestinian people to Israeli aggression and to the Israeli occupation practices; especially in light of the fading and poor attitudes of the Arab, Islamic and international position, which encourages Israel to continue its practices and attacks on the al-Aqsa Mosque. Certainly we all hope that what happened in Mecca is not just restricting internal struggles and stopping the flow of Palestinian blood, but also is a prelude to a comprehensive national reconciliation through which we can regain the most prominent elements of the Palestinian force, a national front to able to respond more forcefully to the ongoing aggression on al-Aqsa Mosque and on our people in Jerusalem.

Host: Mr. Zeidan, you have indirectly alluded to the subject of dialogue, which brings us to our following question, but let's go back to what is happening now. Israel has not announced so far that it will stop the excavation, and therefore is continuing what is on the ground. A spokesman for the Israeli police, who was with us a little bit ago, said the situation is completely under control. Does this mean that the matter was ended by the Palestinians at this point?

Saleh Zeidan : Absolutely not, absolutely not. This is a continuation of the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and the spirit of the people of Jerusalem, al-Aqsa Mosque, and therefore this tension created by Israel and the instability will mount. This is striking a very sensitive chord at the Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic levels. Therefore, this will not stop, and we all recognize that these Israeli practices will create the third "intifada" uprising, a renewed Palestinian uprising that does not stop at the borders of Jerusalem. We are one people at home and abroad. Any attack on al-Aqsa or on our people in Jerusalem is an attack on all the Palestinian people, and our people will continue to resist and fight...

Host: Ok, Mr. Saleh. What are you going to do practically, I mean, whether you will continue this objection, practically on the ground or politically-- what will you do in the next step?

Saleh Zeidan: We say that this risky attack on al-Aqsa Mosque and the Israeli practices, tries to exploit the internal conflict, through building more settlements, through the confiscation of land, through using ethnic and racial profiling, or aggression. To confront such practices we must build a genuine Palestinian national unity and a genuine Palestinian national government. And...

Host: Mr. Zeidan, speaking of the national unity which you hope to achieve, will you on the other hand, not consider the agreement in Mecca to have achieved this unity?

Saleh Zeidan: What has been achieved in Mecca stopped the bleeding, and that is something required, stopping the bloodshed is essential, but it did not live up to the limits of a national unity government. Therefore we say to the brothers who signed the agreement in Mecca to return to an all-inclusive national dialogue in order to build a government of national unity in accordance with the National Accord; which provides the participation of all the forces, parliamentary blocs, the forces of the Palestinian factions, and the institutions of civil society. Because this bilateral monopoly does not open the door to get out of the crisis, this is a dead end as has been highlighted during recent periods and dialogues. The way...

Host: Ok, Mr. Saleh, from your comments we see that there is a bilateral dialogue. Were you excluded from the dialogue?

Saleh Zeidan: let me say that this exclusion is not possible; this bilateralism produces calm. The Palestinian people were happy with yesterday's results, but they want a solution to the root of the crisis. The roots of the crisis are in the dualism of power between Fatah and Hamas. Still dualism; and we all went through the civil war to eliminate dualism. The solution then is a national partnership, political partnership, from all the national forces and institutions of society in a government of national unity founded on a political program derived from the National Accord, Arabic, and international legitimacy resolutions. Only then can we progress to resolve the crisis, because the crisis is not only at home but at home and abroad. In order to initiate the activation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the adoption of the electoral laws that prevent monopolies, and the laws of proportional representation, which ensure fair representation, and build up the community and the institutions of a unified society on the basis of unity, and also build national institutions on the basis of national unity.

Host: Mr. Zeidan, you talk of what was achieved in Mecca as if there is some sort of condemnation over the loss of legitimacy of this upcoming government; can that be gathered from your words?

Saleh Zeidan: the problem is not the issue of legitimacy. Since the Legislative Council elections, sharp discrepancies have turned into dualism in power. The engine of dualism power is continuously colliding. The solution to such dualism happens if there is agreement on a Palestinian National Accord. In the sense we build Palestinian national unity among all, and not just between two parties that often require a bridge to abridge their differences and require cement to keep their unity. The role of the bridge and the cement needs to be played by other parties. Today, we see what is happening at Al-Aqsa, our people are in dire need of national unity comprising all to confront this occupation, and to achieve freedom and independence.

Host: You've clarified the idea. Thank you. Mr. Saleh Zeidan, a member of the political bureau of the Democratic Front, was with us on the phone from Gaza.

Host: After all, we will continue and we will go live to Fatin Ulwan, our correspondent in Ramallah, where we just heard gunfire on the Qalandia checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem. Fatin, what are the details?

Faten: Yes, there are fierce clashes taking place between the Palestinian youths who tried to penetrate the Qalandia checkpoint to go to Jerusalem. In the framework which the Islamic bloc and the Palestinian factions rose to today, holding marches to save al-Aqsa mosque, and to put an end to the attacks against it. At the time when the young men tried to go to the Qalandia military checkpoint, the Israeli army called in very large security forces to stop the young people from going to Jerusalem. Now there are fierce confrontations, the Qalandia military crossing is closed completely, and even the street leading to it is completely closed. That road is the only road linking the West Bank and Jerusalem. There are four or five injuries from rubber bullets and dozens fainted from tear gas. Israeli army showered the young men with tear gas. The main street leading to the Qalandia military checkpoint is also a crowded street with many ancient buildings; they are all subjected to tear gas and Israeli attacks. The situation was very dangerous and the (youth) ... Now, now we are hearing news that Palestinian gunmen are arriving at the Qalandia military checkpoint. It seems that things will turn the confrontations from stones and bullets to a fully-armed confrontation between the two sides. Now there are movements from the Israeli army, which withdrew a little back in light of the reports of the arrival of armed Palestinians into the barrier. The whole picture here is very similar to the picture in 2000 that started of al-Aqsa Intifada, when Ariel Sharon visited al-Aqsa Mosque. Now these pictures are taking us five or six years back.

Host: Yes, Fatin. Through your observations of these facts, can you give us figures? The crowd you speak and the Israeli security measures on the other hand, what are your estimates?

Fatin: From the Israeli side, I can see hundreds of Israeli soldiers and hundreds of military patrols, which vary between small patrols and large patrols in what is known as Israeli "Hummers". On the Palestinian side, we are talking about approximately one thousand or two thousand Palestinian demonstrators, engaging now with Israeli forces in an attempt to reach the Qalandia military checkpoint, and from there to Jerusalem. I mean, those are figures in the context of the vast amount of Israeli forces, which I see here in front of me and on the other side are the young Palestinians. Now in the beginning, they were using tear gas and rubber bullets, but we have just heard the voices of live bullets fired at the young Palestinians. I see the strange movements between the Israeli army as if they were relegated from the highest hills overlooking the young Palestinians ... [They] Now, everyone is calling to go back and take cover a little because there are armed Palestinians arrived at the Qalandia checkpoint on the outskirts of the Qalandia camp, which is a camp for Palestinian refugees. The Israeli army began to retreat slightly backwards and coming down from the high areas from which they were firing...

Host: Where are the gunmen, Fatin? Those you said had arrived, where are these armed men? Are they next to or near the area where you are?

Fatin: They are on the other side of the area where I am. We are on the Israeli side to avoid being exposed to Israeli bullets. I see the group of young men on the other side, I just cannot tell if any of them is armed. A group of young men told us to back up and stay away from the scene. They are also calling for citizens to stay away from Israeli soldiers. These warnings usually come only when the other side of armed Palestinians shows up. Now all the citizens are moving away from the front of any Israeli patrols on the other side, and even Israeli forces are backing up. The street was full of military patrols but started moving back.

Host: Is it preparations for confrontations?

Fatin: It seems so, yes. I mean, this is a well-known protocol to us. When we or the citizens are asked to vacate the street, that always means an armed confrontation. This all comes in the framework of warnings and demands, but so far I do not see any armed youths, nor hear the sound of any bullets coming from the Palestinian side. However, they are apparently Israeli preparations that indicate that such warnings ring true and we can see that from the sudden changes taking place. Military patrols retreated to the headquarters of the Israeli barrier and there is no party or any young Israelis who were standing by and watching what was going on. Palestinian crowds now approaching from the other side, approaching the part of the Israeli army, but so far I do not see any armed Palestinian nor hear any sound of Palestinian bullets. Usually the sound of Palestinian gunfire can be distinguished from the sound of Israeli bullets.

Host: Fatin, through your observation of the crowds, between the crowds of citizens and the crowds of armed security forces, what captured your attention more? I mean, does the movement of these crowds seem coordinated through specific individuals there on the ground? Is there anything that unites them? Are there certain slogans? Is it possible to talk about Palestinian unity at least in this position after what took place in the Palestinian territories, colors, words? What has captured your attention?

Fatin: What captured my attention most is the spontaneous, excited crowd. Yesterday there was a call for street marches in the West Bank. As soon as they heard of confrontations, everyone went automatically to the Qalandia military checkpoint in an attempt to reach Jerusalem. I see flags for all political spectrums. People here are young people who have come to the rescue of al-Aqsa without special invitation. Not as Hamas and Fatah, as if the attack on the al-Aqsa Mosque reminded them that there is only one Palestinian voice that defends al-Aqsa Mosque.

Host: Thank you very much, Fatin, for providing this information about the shooting at the Qalandia checkpoint which is a military checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem. You were with us from Ramallah.

Host: Yes, we continue, and joining us, Mr. Maher Muqdad, a spokesman for the Fatah movement, speaks to us from Gaza. Mr. Maher, are these the signs of a third uprising or is this just a spontaneous movement that will expire shortly after? Mr. Muqdad, you are on the air. Do you hear me now?

Maher Muqdad: I hear you, I hear you. Do you hear me? I heard the question, but I was correcting you I am speaking to you from Mecca and not from Gaza. What is happening now is certainly very serious. This is a continuation of an Israeli criminal series aimed at the "Judaization" of Jerusalem and aggression against the Palestinian people in general. I believe that the second Intifada started under similar conditions. Just as Sharon entered the al-Aqsa mosque, the world went up in arms for a period of six years. I think the second intifada, which did not end, could escalate in intensity to the furthest extent. This is not only just a sacred place of worship; al- Aqsa Mosque for us and for all Muslims is the sign of our dignity. We do not accept in any way the destruction of the place, nor any threat to it, nor any attempted annexation to change its features. Consequently, this requires all Palestinian or non-Palestinian efforts to be exerted towards stopping this systematic abuse, which the Zionist occupation authority never ceased for even a day. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Palestinian people stand united with all their functional and living elements away from the designations of political identities in the face of this aggression, because we understand what this assault means. There is a very important issue in the timing of this attack, which coincided with the presence of Fatah and Hamas in the fringes of the al-Kaaba (Mecca) ending the state of division and fragmentation and the bloodshed that was going on, in the Gaza Strip in particular. Our evaluation is that this intervention has a clear and specific message. They want the continuation of the state of division. While the Palestinians are recovering, they choose to directly intervene to set things back to square one. We say that this intervention, certainly, creates a state of unity against the Zionist occupier. This makes us forget our ID cards and partisan political factions so that the core issue remains Palestine and this sacred place which brings together all Muslims.

Host: Yes. Speaking to us today from Mecca and about the Mecca Agreement, Mr. Abbas condemned what is happening today and called for a unified stand. Why did we not see a unified stand out of Mecca between the Palestinian factions at least an indication of what has been agreed upon as a reference to the possibility of the implementation of a government of national unity? Why is this an isolated stand? Mr. Maher Muqdad, we seem to have lost the connection.

Host: At any rate, we will continue and go back to our correspondent in Jerusalem, Magdi al-Halabi. Maadi, Mr. Mickey Rosenfield, the spokesman for the Israeli police, said that things are under control. Of course, you can confirm the extent of this control, and of course we welcome your guest.

Magdi: Of course, as Mickey said, the police controlled the situation and there is a calm now that hangs over the courtyard of al-Aqsa Mosque. The confrontations that were here, or rather the police shooting into the congregation, had ended. Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsour, who is here with me, is the president of the Islamic movement and member of the Knesset. He was present inside al-Aqsa Mosque. Sheikh Ibrahim, what happened? How did the confrontation occur in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque?

Ibrahim Sarsour: Let me first refute what Mickey said at the beginning of your introduction. Israel did not control the situation, since the clashes were not between two equal parties. What happened is a very simple tragedy, a tragedy to the fullest extent of the word. At the moment we finished praying, before we even greeted those to our right and to our left, the attack began. I mean, there weren't even young people there. We all know that only those who are over forty-five years old were allowed to enter al-Aqsa, other than women. But there were no young men. Immediately after the prayers, the attack began. It was a brutal attack in which they used all tools. I and the rest of the scholars at al-Aqsa tried in every way to appease the congregation. From the altar of the blessed al-Aqsa, within the siege, in the midst of noise and commotion and explosives, I tried to contact all the Israeli and non-Israeli authorities in order to stop this evil aggression and brutal attack. I told them frankly, the only solution to calm the situation is an immediate withdrawal. There is no justification for this attack, and regrettably this attack concluded with many wounded who were not transferred to hospitals in a timely manner. The matter ended in half an hour, we were inside al-Aqsa Mosque with thousands of worshippers. We closed the doors, and the Israeli police closed the doors from the outside with iron chains, and we were not allowed to open the doors until we reached an agreement with them. This is what they suggested to us at the beginning; they wanted the worshippers to exit in small groups. We told them that would be impossible since it is clear that there is a plan to either arrest or attack such small groups. The only solution was the withdrawal and evacuation of the congregation in a peaceful manner, and that's what actually happened.

Magdi: Sheikh Ibrahim, did you expect this attack from the Israeli police on the congregation, in spite of all the existing security measures?

Ibrahim Sarsour: we did not expect that. For a few days now, Israel wants to prove its control over al-Aqsa Mosque. The issue is not a security issue nor is it to preserve the stability and security. None of these police allegations happened; no one threw stones at the Wailing Wall, this is nonsense. These allegations have no basis to support them, and the proof is that the attack began immediately before the congregation could even leave their place of praying. Why this siege? Why the use of such force? In a vicious manner, the number of troops exceeded the number of worshipers. Then why not allow the wounded to vacate in a humane manner to receive treatment? I think there was no occasion warranting the use of such force. There is no contrast between the size of the force, and between the peaceful Muslim worshippers in the mosque.

Magdi: Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsour, thank you very much for your participation. Then the police version says that there were young men who tried to assault or throw stones at the Western Wall. Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsour tells us that this did not happen at all, and that the attack was just before the end of the prayers, right before the worshippers finish their Friday prayers. Yes. We go back to the studio in Washington.

Host: Thank you, Magdi. Of course, I want to know in one last question, how is the atmosphere? Are the soldiers still...

Host: Magdi probably can tell us this information in our next news segment in approximately twenty minutes. We were following-up on the developments and clashes that occurred inside and around and al-Aqsa Mosque as a result of excavations carried out by Israel. More details in our next news segment. Thank you.

Host: Thank you, our viewers. good-bye.